

- 73 Cui Bao (fl. 290–306), *Gu jin zhu* in *Gu jin zhu Zhonghua gu jin zhu Sushi yanyi* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1956), 9–11.
- 74 Wang Xianqian, *Shiming shuzheng bu* in *Erya Guangya Fangyan Shiming sizhong Qingshu hekan* (Shanghai: Guji, 1989), 1071.
- 75 For the rich significance of *que* towers in early China, see Wu Hung, *Monumentality in Early Chinese Art and Architecture* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1995), 276–8.
- 76 For a discussion of the boundary between the living and dead worlds, see Wu Hung, “Beyond the ‘Great Boundary’: Funerary Narrative in the Cangshan Tomb,” in *Boundaries in China*, ed. John Hay (London: Reaktion Books, 1994), 81–104.
- 77 *Huainanzi*, in *ZZJC*, 7:2.23.
- 78 The difference between the two may well be some morphological variations and a matter of naming when we read Falin’s reference to “the Shadow Pagodas (*yingta*) . . . in magnificent symmetry” in tandem with Huiyuan’s Shadow Cave towers. See Falin, “Bianzhen lun,” T52:507a.
- 79 *Baqiongshi jinshi buzheng* [Supplement to the stone and metal inscriptions of the Chamber of Eight Jewels], comp. Lu Zenxiang (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1985), 172.
- 80 *Fayuan zhulin*, T53:578b.
- 81 Huiyuan, “Foying ming,” T52:198a; translation quoted in Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1959), 2:242–3.
- 82 Zhiyi, *Stopping and Seeing*, 59.
- 83 *Jinshi cuibian*, 2:89.2a–3a.
- 84 Huiyuan, “Foying ming,” T52:198b; translation quoted in Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China*, 2:242–3.
- 85 Foucault, “Of Other Spaces,” 352.
- 86 Zhiyi, *Stopping and Seeing*, 58.
- 87 *Quan Tang wen*, ed. Dao Gao et al. (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1990), 5:4527.
- 88 *Jinshi cuibian*, 2:89.3a.
- 89 Zhiyi, *Stopping and Seeing*, 88.
- 90 *Buddhist Scriptures*, trans. Edward Conze (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1959), 125–6; see also Bhaddantacariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. Bhikkhu Nanamoli (Colombo, Ceylon: R. Semage, 1956), 431.

CHAPTER SIX

TO SAY AND TO SEE

Ekphrasis and Vision in Byzantium

ROBERT S. NELSON

In 1963, Cyril Mango published an article that was highly influential in its day and whose title, “Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder,” still locates it squarely within the concerns of contemporary art historical and cultural studies. Three decades later, Mango’s essay seems remarkably precocious because it emphasized not the statues themselves but the responses of Byzantine spectators to them, as well as to their own art. Buried in the middle of the article is a sentence that has intrigued me since I was a graduate student. I will call it “Mango’s paradox”:

Our own appreciation of Byzantine art stems largely from the fact that this art is not naturalistic; yet the Byzantines themselves, judging by their extant statements, regarded it as being highly naturalistic and as being directly in the tradition of Phidias, Apelles, and Zeuxis.¹

What connects the two parts of this sentence is the semicolon, that curious grammatical hybrid, more than a comma, less than a period, implying something less than a caesura, a cutting off, break, or pause, but also something more vexed than the comma’s lazy continuity. Thus, the semicolon is the appropriate sign to join and separate the parts of the sentence and the two worlds as Prof. Mango understands them, ours and theirs.

In the space of that mark of punctuation, several books and many articles can be fitted. Some already have been written – an early reaction being an article of Henry Maguire in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*² – others will doubtlessly appear in the future. In our century, Byzantine art is generally considered to be flat, linear, and schematic. These were the attributes that brought it to the attention of the avant-garde in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and made it a favorite of modernist painters, such as Vasily Kandinsky, Gustav Klimt, or Fernand Léger, and modernist critics, such as Clive Bell or Clement Greenberg. These attitudes are deeply ingrained in both general and specialized discourses and constitute the aesthetic basis of much scholarship on Byzantine art, a matter to which I will return at the end.

Suffice it to conclude for the moment that Mango's simple, direct statement that for us "this art is not naturalistic" is not simple at all.

* * *

Thus I turn to the second part of Mango's sentence. The Byzantines did indeed respond to their art as if it were highly naturalistic, although not quite in this manner. They described their religious images as "like-life," implying thereby not our aesthetic category of naturalistic, but literally lifelike, that is, living or alive. Such adjectives were applied to the Virgin in the apse of Hagia Sophia (Fig. 21). It is also true that Byzantine authors, seeking to praise this or that image, evoked the work of celebrated ancient artists. However, the conflict that Mango sets up between us and them is both real and contrived – real because we and they are surely not the same, but contrived because the terms of the discussion are problematic. Implicit in Mango's formulation here and throughout this and other studies is the notion that Byzantine texts can be "a dim and distorting mirror," as he put it in his inaugural lecture at Oxford.³ As an archaeologist and historian, Mango looks to reconstruct lost monuments and events from Byzantine texts, and his significant contributions in this regard have had a major impact.⁴ Yet texts do not always tell him what he wants to know; they do not conform to what we see when we look at this art; thus they are distorted. To use them, the historian "has to sift out all the antiquarian passages before he obtains a residue" of historical value.⁵

Scholars have dealt with these issues in different ways. Next after Mango was Henry Maguire, who wrote his dissertation on Byzantine descriptions of art, the genre of the *ekphrasis*. In an article of 1974, he sorted out what was truth and convention in *ekphrases*, concluding that they did have evidentiary value, if read correctly.⁶ In a subsequent book of 1981, he looked more closely at their rhetorical structures and sought similar formal characteristics in Byzantine painting.⁷ Separating out rhetorical convention as Mango recommended, Maguire made significant advances in our interpretation of Byzantine *ekphrasis*. A more recent study, coauthored with Alexander Kazhdan, has introduced more evidence from saints' lives and endorsed another line of interpretation. Because Byzantine art is so restricted in its formal means, its medieval audiences were accustomed to its narrow range of variables and better appreciated subtle variations than do modern viewers.⁸ This explanation also has its virtues, there being no single interpretation that could ever account for something as complex as the viewing practices of a culture.

Indeed, if prior theories can be critiqued, it is because they have tended to narrow rather than widen the discussion. In Mango's position, there is a conflict between what we see and what they saw. Following his lead, I would amend that problem as follows: There is a conflict between what we say we see and what they said they saw. That is, the textuality or discursive practices of us and them need also to be considered. We must entertain the notion, as Foucault puts it, that in certain circumstances, seeing and saying or writing are a product of what he calls the "loquacious gaze" and belong to the same system, a self-reinforcing structure of



21. Hagia Sophia. Istanbul. Apsal mosaic, Virgin and Child. Ninth Century. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

thought "that carves up and articulates what is seen and what is said."⁹ Thus, to consider the act of seeing in a certain society or period leads inextricably to general issues of cultural construction and maintenance.¹⁰ From this point, it is only a short distance to that emerging field, the anthropology of the senses,¹¹ or to the by-now well established investigation of what Michael Baxandall termed the "period eye," thus introducing another perceptual metaphor.¹²

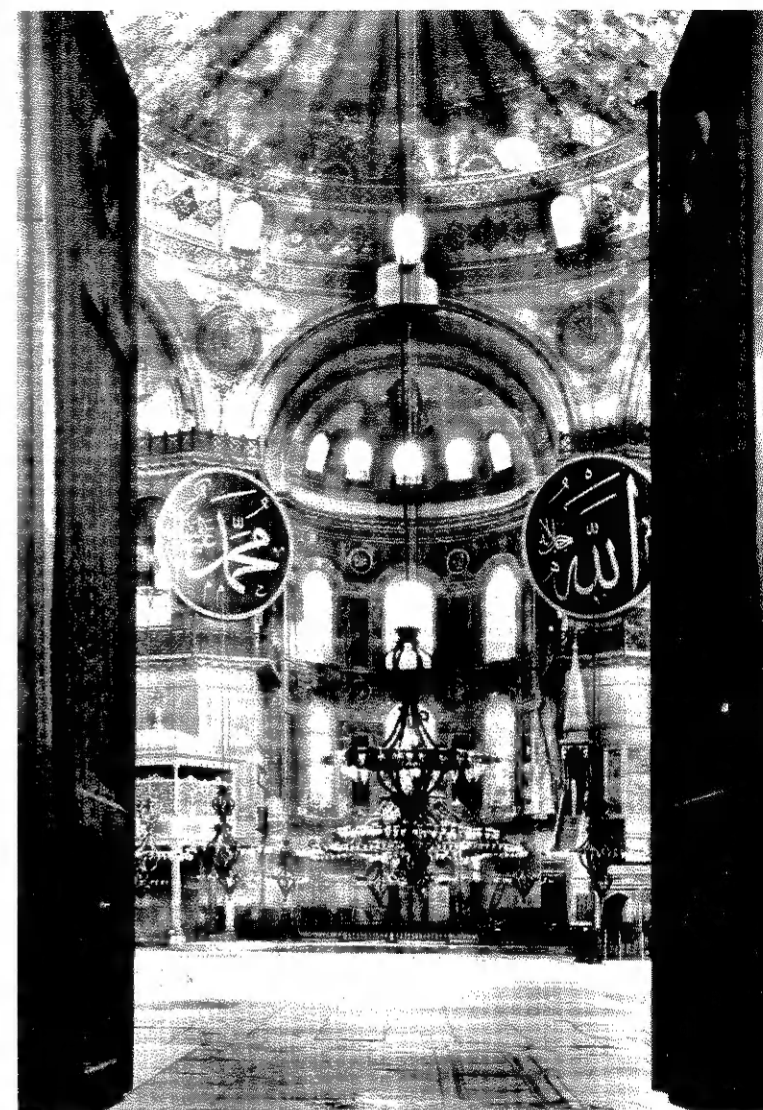
In the last decade or so, scholarship on Byzantine art has seldom engaged all these

theoretical developments, but serious attempts to introduce new concerns have succeeded in shifting the discourse. In his 1985 book, *Writing in Gold*, Robin Cormack looked at art through texts, employing texts to frame the contexts, uses, and meanings of images, and he titled a collection of his earlier essays *The Byzantine Eye*, although it mainly treats patronage, not perception.¹³ The act of framing is itself at the core of the important recent book of Jás Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*.¹⁴ Another member of what, from this vantage point, appears to be the London School of Looking is Liz James. She has published a reinterpretation of Byzantine discussions of pagan statuary, the topic of Mango's essay three decades earlier. There she considers these reactions not as a manifestation of superstition against modern rationalism, but as evidence for the power of images and the manipulation of an ancient past in a medieval present.¹⁵

The issue of the relationship of description to object, which remains problematic, was considered in 1991 by Liz James and Ruth Webb.¹⁶ Here, Byzantine ekphrasis is studied in the context of ancient and medieval rhetoric. These texts, they note, are meant to parallel the work of art, not substitute for it, and thus they represent the responses of the author to the work and are neither necessarily, nor merely, a description of it.¹⁷ James and Webb conclude that ekphrases are more valuable as evidence of the act of perceiving that art work than the object itself. A similar conclusion was reached in another article by James from the same year. There, she studies how Byzantines reacted to color, concluding that their perceptions were fundamentally different from ours. Like ancient authors, Byzantine writers emphasized saturation and especially brightness, as opposed to the modern appreciation of hue.¹⁸ Now these thoughts on color have been further developed in James's important book of 1996.¹⁹

My interest in these sources leads in a similar direction. Rather than consider these descriptions for, say, their emotive or rhetorical significance, as Maguire has done, I want to look at them for clues to optical perception, or vision and visibility. And I will do this primarily through the analysis of one of the best-known ekphrases; the sermon that Patriarch Photios delivered on March 29, 867, in the vast nave of the cathedral church of Constantinople, Hagia Sophia (Fig. 22).²⁰ The occasion for Photios's speech was the inauguration of the first major mosaic decoration in the church after more than a century of strife over the legitimacy of religious images. Speaking on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter, the Patriarch celebrated the mosaic of Mary and her child in the apse of the Great Church (Fig. 21), praised the two emperors present for commissioning it, denounced yet again the errors of Iconoclasm, and restated the tenets of Byzantine image theory.

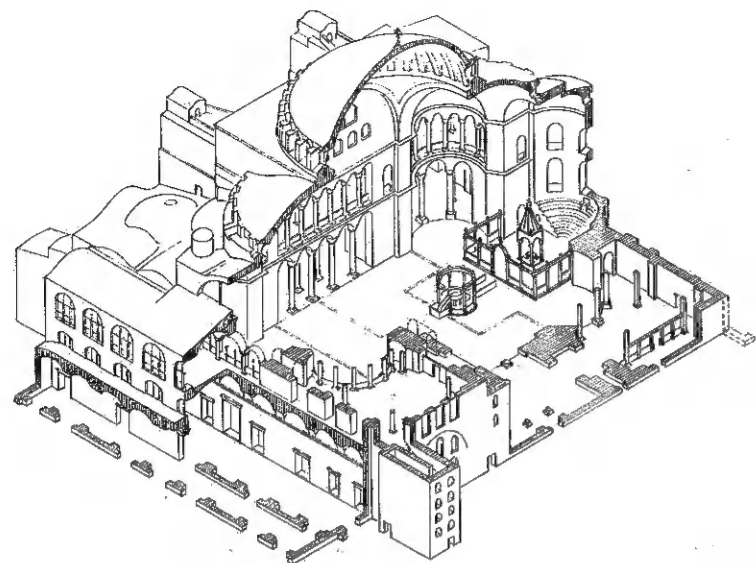
Photios spoke from the church's ambo or pulpit, which is no longer extant but has been reconstructed from textual descriptions and archaeological evidence (Fig. 23).²¹ Like other early Byzantine churches, the ambo of Hagia Sophia extended into the nave and was connected with the presbytery by a long, narrow passageway. The actual pulpit was at the end of this affair, between the major eastern piers about seven meters east of the nave's center. Scaled to suit the vast size of the nave, the



22. Hagia Sophia. View through Imperial Door (after Wolfgang Müller-Wiener, *Bildlexikon zur Topographie Istanbuls* [Tübingen: Wasmuth, 1977], Fig. 76).

ambo was entered by flights of stairs to the east and west and stood high enough for choirs beneath to chant the Psalms. In this position, the preacher could command the attention of the congregation that filled the nave, as well as the imperial entourage that were gathered around the emperor's throne in the south aisle.²²

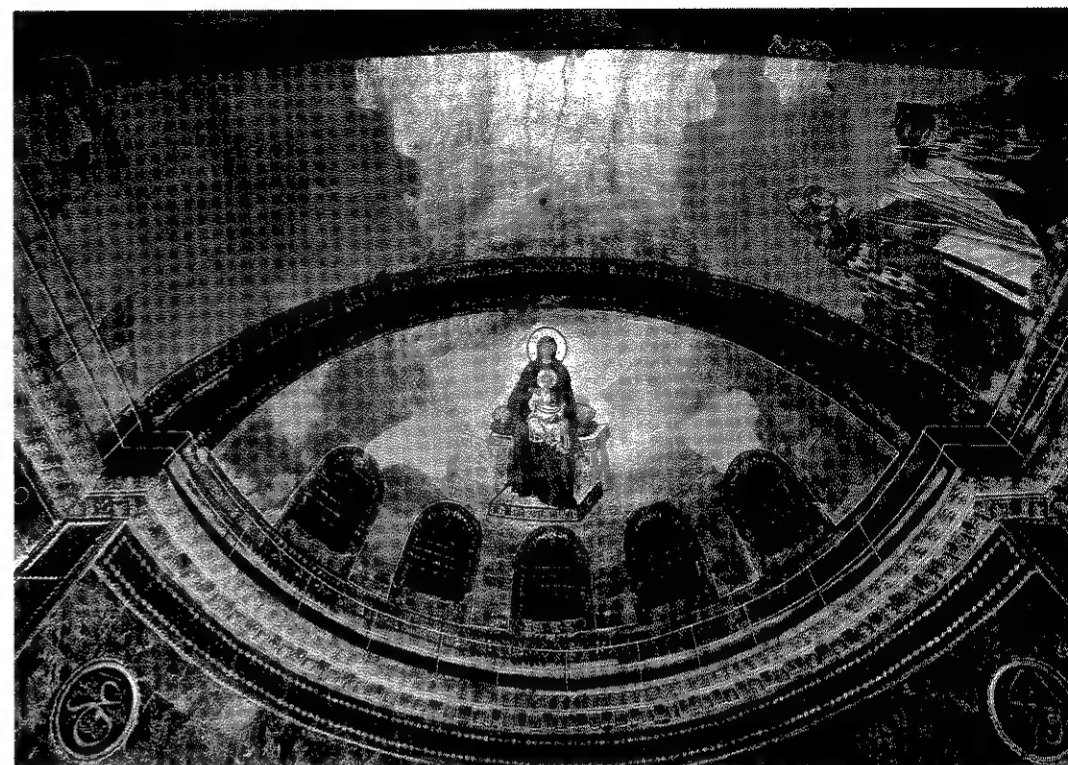
My purpose in belaboring the position of the ambo is to set up the view that Photios and much of his congregation had of the apse and its mosaic. The standard art historical accountings of this mosaic illustrate it with images like the one with which I began (Fig. 21). Such a photo, taken straight-on from scaffolding, erects



23. Hagia Sophia. (From Rowland J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* [New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988], Fig. 252).

another scaffolding around the medieval image, turning it, first, into a photograph, a system of representation in our world, and, second, into the equivalent of a painting, the raw material of our art history and thus readily absorbable in art historical narratives. The medieval beholders' view of the mosaic was quite different. From the ceremonially significant central entrance to the nave, nowadays one sees only a dense web of scaffolding at the eastern end of the nave. In older photographs (Fig. 22), showing the five large windows of the eastern semidome, the mosaic registers as a small, dark shadow. Only the clergy looked at the apse from immediately below it (Fig. 24), another frequently published view, for this area was behind the chancel barrier (Fig. 23) that extended into the central space of the church and connected with the ambo. Because of the windows in the apse, the available space for a mosaic was proportionally more limited than in the windowless apse of a typical Middle Byzantine church and the visual impact of the mosaic correspondingly reduced. Finally, by the time that Photios delivered his sermon, he was most likely in his late fifties in an age before eyeglasses.²³ Although I know of no evidence that Photios had trouble seeing, the general visual acuity of both speaker and audience must surely have differed from the mechanically corrected eyesight of modern congregations. Thus, for several reasons, Photios and the congregation assembled on that day did not see this mosaic as art historians do today, and certainly not as well as the reader looking at Figure 21.

It is not so surprising, then, that Photios does not actually say much about the mosaic itself, and when he does, his description departs from the actual image. Oikonomidès, for example, noted that Photios describes the Virgin as standing,²⁴ in



24. Hagia Sophia. Apse mosaic from below. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

spite of the large throne behind her. Since Photios's text is scarcely the record of extemporaneous performance, this discrepancy might be due to his having composed this sermon in his study and thus far from the actual mosaic. On the other hand, perhaps he did try to see the mosaic from the ambo, and the problem is this vantage point. As Mango and Hawkins explain, the mosaic is correctly proportioned only if seen from directly below (Fig. 24). In their opinion, the mosaicists designed the composition from scaffolding without regard for its appearance from the floor.²⁵ Toward the center of the nave, the figure of the Virgin lengthens, and the ratio of head to body becomes 1:9. These are the proportions of not merely a standing figure but an elongated one at that. And indeed from that vantage point, Mary appears strangely distorted and awkwardly positioned in relation to the throne (Fig. 25).

Elsewhere, Photios notes that the Virgin "fondly turns her eyes on her begotten Child in the affection of her heart, yet assumes the expression of a detached and imperturbable mood at the passionless and wondrous nature of her offspring, and composes her gaze accordingly."²⁶ Because in the mosaic Mary does not physically turn and look at the child, Maguire considered this part of the description to be an example of rhetorical elaboration.²⁷ It may just as well be the result either of Photios's distance from the image or his attempt to extol the deep maternal love Mary had for her son.²⁸ The acknowledgment of her detached mood, a few words later, returns us

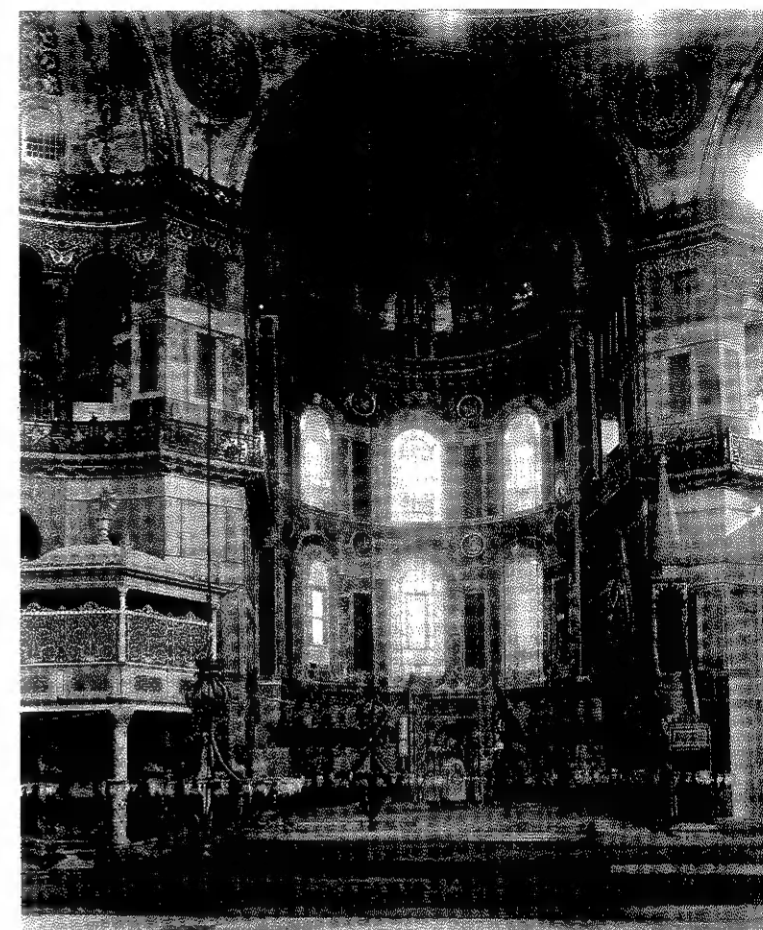
to the mosaic. The two ostensibly contradictory statements are an example of the Byzantine love for antithesis that Maguire has described elsewhere.²⁹

Photios's enthusiastic response to Mary belongs to a long ekphrastic tradition from antiquity. In this genre, the author spoke to an audience about a work of art they shared in such a way as not to belabor the description of what everyone could see, but to offer personal testimony to the emotional character of the representation and thus to enhance the listeners' emphatic reactions.³⁰ But Photios's ekphrasis, of course, was not a mere literary exercise but was part of a sermon, a genre with its own obligations to teach and inspire listeners about the mysteries of the faith. The mosaic being described at this moment belongs to the performative context of a worship service in which a surfeit of enthusiasm about the Virgin is to be expected.

Perhaps because Photios could see the figures of Mary and her son none too well, he soon passes to other subjects, moving in Section Five from the object to the process of vision. This particular discussion, the most useful for my purposes, has been ignored.³¹ The reader is referred to the translation of Cyril Mango in the Appendix to this chapter. The segue that the Patriarch makes to this section is rather clever. Having begun his sermon with a self-referential acknowledgment that even the most laconic person on this occasion would be moved to practice the arts of rhetoric,³² Photios once again directs the audience's attention to the act of speaking. The comprehension that comes from hearing is equated with that from seeing, at least for those pure of heart, and who would not want to be included in that number on this solemn religious occasion? Next, the power of sight is proclaimed superior to the power of hearing and a visual message to an oral one. This is quite a claim to be made by an accomplished orator holding forth in his elaborate patriarchal vestments from the ambo of what was known as the Great Church. But the superiority of vision over hearing had been inherited from antiquity³³ and was frequently evoked by the supporters of icons, the Iconophiles, during the preceding Iconoclastic controversy.³⁴

At the end of this section, Photios gives us his optical theory. Unmistakably, it is a version of the ancient extramission theory of vision, by which optical rays emerge from the eye, extend to the object of vision, touch it, and return to the eye bearing the "essence of the thing seen," which is conveyed to the mind and to the memory. Photios's short rhetorical questions summarize the process: The mind sees, meaning that it sends out the rays through the eye; the rays grasp the thing seen; the rays, upon returning to the eye, cause the thing to be visualized in the brain or intelligence; and that visualization is passed on to the memory. The latter stages of the process, the reception of information in the intelligence, are the same as he describes for hearing, but seeing provides superior information because the optical rays encompass the object.

Photios's theory is derived ultimately from one school of thought about vision in antiquity, the most important members for Byzantium being Plato, Galen, the Stoics, Plutarch, Euclid, Ptolemy, and others.³⁵ But the actual genealogy of Photios's ideas is by no means clear. The Patriarch may have had direct access to any of a



25. Hagia Sophia. View to east from nave. Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D.C.

number of ancient Greek sources. His exceptionally broad reading habits are well documented in his *Bibliotheca*, a compendium of reading notes on several hundred ancient and patristic texts, and ancient science, at least as metaphor, is evoked in another of his sermons.³⁶ If Photios actually made the embassy to the Arabs that he mentioned in the introduction to the *Bibliotheca*, he would have journeyed to a culture that took a great interest in Greek geometry and optics.³⁷ However, neither in the *Bibliotheca* nor elsewhere does Photios show much interest in science, other than medicine.³⁸ Yet, Photios does state in the *Bibliotheca* that he will not treat commonly read texts, and surely the Patriarch had had an excellent general education, so that a basic sense of ancient optics may have been gained early.³⁹

At this point in my paper, I would have liked to sketch the history of the extramission theory of vision in Byzantium and to describe Byzantine scientific thought on vision in general. But this is no easy task, even if it is certain that Byzantines thought differently about seeing than we do. In contrast to medieval science in Latin- and

Arabic-speaking territories, science in Byzantium is little studied. Whereas the recent *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* offers excellent general articles about Islamic and western European optics, it ignores Byzantium, as does Lindberg's well-regarded account of optics before Kepler.⁴⁰ The history of science evidently still subscribes to that version of history the goal of which is to provide a genealogy for Western civilization. In such accounts, Islam plays a larger role than Byzantium because Latin translations from the Arabic had a strong impact on Western medieval science from the twelfth century. However, regardless of the relevance of medieval Greek science to the West or of the number of new theories it did or did not discover, Byzantine notions of the physical world are important for understanding Byzantine civilization. Accordingly, science is discussed in the Byzantine volumes of the *Cambridge Medieval History*. The latter's two-page excursus on Byzantine optics is the most useful that I have encountered, even if its lack of references is frustrating.⁴¹ Now we are also fortunate to have the aforementioned book on color by Liz James. Still, the history of Byzantine vision as a mathematical, physiological, and even moral or theological subject, remains poorly studied.

However, Photios's comments on vision, his endorsement of extramission or what he describes as an outpouring of optical rays from the eyes, can be juxtaposed with other sources, both elite and popular, to suggest that his notions were neither anomalous, exotic, nor recherché. One of the principal exponents for extramission was Euclid, who remained fundamental to Byzantine mathematical teaching throughout the Middle Ages. Euclid provided a geometrical account of extramission in his *Optics*, or rather he based his discussion of the geometry of vision upon certain propositions with which he begins. The first is that rays extend from the eye in the form of straight lines. These – the second proposition – form a visual cone, whose head or apex is the eye and whose foot or base is the boundary of the object seen.⁴² For Euclid, the eye is the active agent in vision and literally the starting point of his mathematical explorations, although it should be emphasized that the eye for him is a geometrical point, not a physiological organism or a perceptual apparatus.⁴³ The *Optics*, included in what is known as the "Little Astronomy," circulated in Byzantium in its original form and in a version by Theon of Alexandria.⁴⁴ Both versions assume extramission. Photios's contemporary Leo the Mathematician, it has been proposed, may be associated with the compilation of the "Little Astronomy" in the ninth century.⁴⁵ Also from this period of cultural renewal, according to Wilson, is an important early scientific manuscript, Rome, Bibl. Vat. gr. 204, containing Euclid's *Optics*,⁴⁶ and the treatise continues to be copied in later centuries. Finally, the *Optics* and its assumption of extramission reappears among the wealth of knowledge collected in the *Quadrivium* of George Pachymeres from around 1300.⁴⁷

In the eleventh century, Michael Psellos, the greatest intellectual of the period, also wrote about optics. His brief account in *De Omnifaria doctrina* is largely Platonic in character and derives directly from Plutarch's version of extramission.⁴⁸ Elsewhere he writes knowledgeably about Plato, Aristotle, and other ancient authorities on vision.⁴⁹ Also in the eleventh century, Symeon Seth took note of the optical the-

ories of the Aristotelians and of the "geometers and many of the philosophers." According to the second group, rays project from the eyes and seize the thing seen.⁵⁰ That several competing theories of vision remained in contention in medieval Byzantium is shown by Nicholas Mesarites' description of medical students at a college or school of higher learning in twelfth-century Constantinople, the one associated with the Church of the Holy Apostles. There the students debated "whether our power of sight directs itself outward or whether images are received by us,"⁵¹ that is, extramission versus intromission.

In sum, all that can be safely said at the moment is that various ancient scientific theories of vision were known in educated circles in Byzantium. This culture seems to have lacked someone like Al-Haytham (Al-Hazen in medieval Europe, died c. 1039), who adjudicated the conflicting visual theories inherited from antiquity. In his case, he also argued persuasively for the greater logic of intromission.⁵² When translated into Latin in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, Al-Haytham's work had a great impact on western European scholars. Although Symeon Seth traveled to Egypt, could read Arabic, and translated the popular romance of *Kalila and Dimna* into Greek,⁵³ it remains to be demonstrated that Islamic optics was as significant a factor in Byzantium as it was in western Europe.⁵⁴

More consequential for the Greek world was the Iconoclastic controversy of the eighth and ninth centuries, and here what was at issue was less scientific theories of vision than the visual itself and, by extension, visuality. Now the visual acquires a political, religious, and cultural importance unmatched elsewhere in the Middle Ages. And Iconodules, such as John of Damascus, emphasize that human perception was the basis for cognition, because the bodily joins with the intellectual to effect understanding.⁵⁵ During and after Iconoclasm, many arguments in support of religious images assumed extramission. Visual theory provided a seemingly natural or scientific defense of the sense of sight and the concomitant legitimacy of the object seen, that is, the icon. For example, John of Damascus takes for granted that his audience shares the notion of extramission, when he asks about an icon, "Shall I not embrace [περιπτύξομαι] with my eyes and lips that which is a wonder to the angels. . . ?"⁵⁶ And again, when he advocates regarding icons that we should "Kiss [ὁσπάζεσθαι] them with the eyes, the lips, the heart."⁵⁷

This embracing or kissing the image visually, I submit, was meant literally as well as metaphorically. Like all successful religious symbolism, this metaphor was grounded in perception and perceptual theory.⁵⁸ Because the optical rays that issue forth from the eyes were thought to touch the object seen, vision was haptic, as well as optic, tactile as well as visual. Vision thus connected one with the object seen, and, according to extramission, that action was initiated by the viewer.⁵⁹ It is for this reason that Photius can speak of the mind grasping the figures in that distant apse mosaic, and John of Damascus can write of embracing the icon with the eyes as well as the lips. This aspect of the holy person depicted will thus be transmitted to the heart through the agency of the two tactile senses of vision and touch. That for the faithful seeing was like touching is shown by a testimonial included in the

acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council. The story concerns a woman with chronic discharge of blood who was cured by an icon of St. Symeon the Younger. She "came to see the image with much faith, and forthwith her discharge ceased. For she had said to herself, 'If only I see his likeness, I shall be saved.'"⁶⁰ The story is a reprise of the Gospel account of a woman with an issue of blood being healed by touching the robe of Jesus (Mark 6:25-34), only now the touching is with the eyes, not the hand.

Like Photios at the beginning of the passage under discussion (see chapter Appendix), John of Damascus also considered vision, "the first of senses," to be superior to hearing, a concept that can be traced back to Aristotle and to others before him.⁶¹ In the early ninth century, the Patriarch Nikephoros, a proponent of images, expounded on this notion with the aid of Aristotelian physics. Seeing is superior to hearing, according to Nikephoros, because that which is seen is perceived more quickly, distinctly, and sharply than that which is heard, for the visible travels faster than the aural.⁶² Because of this and other reasons, the supporters of images argued that the image was greater than the text, words being understood to be heard, rather than read. Although John of Damascus described religious images as "books of the illiterate,"⁶³ he also considered them to be efficacious for the literate, so that if one lacked books, or the time to read them, entering a church and seeing its icons would refresh one's soul.⁶⁴

In sum, Photios's notion of vision was hardly an idiosyncratic revival of obscure ancient learning, but part of a general acceptance of extramission in Byzantium, especially in regard to image theory. But in the passage in question, Photios also reveals his assumptions regarding cognition and the senses through his comparison of seeing and hearing, the senses operative at that moment for the congregation. Information was obtained from both senses, but the knowledge gained through sight was superior because it was more secure, a notion affirmed during Iconoclasm.⁶⁵ The person hearing merely turns his ear to a story; the person seeing sends out optical rays to touch the object. The cognitive effects of vision and hearing are contrasted directly and indirectly by Photios: "[T]he comprehension that comes about through sight is shown in very fact to be far superior to the learning that penetrates through the ears." Learning (*μάθησις*) penetrates or enters through the ears, but the result of seeing, the word that Mango justly translates as comprehension (*κατάληψις*), bears the additional connotation of seizing or taking, an overt act and a tactile association appropriate for ancient and medieval vision.

This difference between seeing and hearing is crucial to their religious significances, according to the excellent book of David Chidester. He reviews the ancient theories of vision and hearing. If seeing is complicated, hearing in antiquity and Byzantium is thankfully more simple.⁶⁶ One hears after a blow to an object has traveled through the air to one's ear. Unlike seeing, hearing is not, therefore, initiated by the listener, but by the speaker. The notion was widespread and often encountered, for example, in the Bible, as in the opening of Psalm 77 (78), well known in Byzantium: "Give heed, O my people to my law; incline your ear to the words of

my mouth." The same understanding of hearing is evident in an invocation of the twelfth-century author Nikolaos Mesarites: "[M]ay God grant that my prayers may fall on the ears of those who are willing to hear them."⁶⁷ The multiple stages of hearing and cognition are described by Nikolaos Mesarites in his ekphrasis of the Annunciation to Mary:

The word comes to the hearing of the Virgin, and enters through it to the brain; the intelligence which is seated in the brain at once lays hold upon what comes to it, recognizes the matter by its perception, and then communicates to the heart itself what it had understood. The heart is immediately agitated, and debates begin to rise up to the maiden's heart as she debates, in virtuous fashion, what the greeting means.⁶⁸

In sum, hearing was passive, discontinuous, and disconnected and took place over time. Seeing was active, continuous, and connected, and took place immediately. The two senses prompted different associations. With hearing were associated discontinuity, difference, distance, temporality, and a passive subject. In contrast, seeing implied continuity, connection, presence, immediacy, and an active subject.

In the Middle Ages, visual perception was not so simple, or necessarily so benign. Vision was active, but it also could be aggressive, as, for example, in the phenomenon of the evil eye. Predicated upon extramission or active vision, belief in the evil eye is found throughout the world and is accompanied by a correspondingly diffuse scholarly literature.⁶⁹ In Byzantium, the fear of the evil eye and of the power to bewitch was shared by all social classes, not merely the lower classes with their so-called popular or naive beliefs.⁷⁰ In the eleventh century, the erudite Michael Psellos argued, for example, that it was possible to bewitch someone by a glance, concluding that human beings experience and produce many effects through their eyes.⁷¹ The church fathers had inveighed against the evil eye. Basil attributed the belief to women,⁷² and John Chrysostomos thought that "the eye not only of the wanton but even of the modest woman pierces and disturbs the soul."⁷³ The power of the eye to do evil remained undiminished in late Byzantium as well, to judge from a letter of Theodore Metochites in which he evoked the evil spirit and its ability to bewitch by means of never-closed eyes.⁷⁴

What these disparate sources suggest is that Byzantines regarded vision as dynamic, forceful, consequential, and even performative, in the sense that looking was doing. This sense of vision is useful, I suggest, for interpreting not only Photios's sermon but also ekphrasis more generally. The *Greek Anthology* offers a useful example, a poem that once accompanied a lost mosaic in the Imperial Palace:

The ray (*ἄκτις*) of Truth has shone forth again and has dimmed the eyes of the impostors. Piety has grown, error has fallen, faith blooms and Grace spreads out. For behold, once again the image of Christ shines above the imperial throne and confounds the murky heresies.⁷⁵

The mosaic, an approximate contemporary of the Virgin and child in the apse of Hagia Sophia, represented Christ, probably enthroned above the actual throne of

the Byzantine emperor. In the text, the image of Christ is somehow also Christ himself, present, active, and alive. Like the beautiful women that Chrysostom feared, this Christ sends out a ray, in the sense of a ray of light or an optical ray from the eye. This ray can harm others, in this case, the eyes of false teachers. By such rays, the image shines forth and topples "dark heresies." This is extramission, the same sensibility that underlies the metaphors of Photios. For example, elsewhere in the sermon under discussion, Photios calls the church "the eye of the universe." Stripped of its images by the Iconoclasts, this church could emit only "faint rays" toward its beholders and appeared sad to them.⁷⁶

That the holy one, even as metaphor, has potent eyes we can appreciate in a well-known passage from Nikolaos Mesarites concerning a half-figured representation of Christ in the main dome of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople:

This dome, shows in pictured form the God-Man Christ, leaning and gazing out as though from the rim of heaven, at the point where the dome begins, toward the floor of the Church and everything in it, but not with His whole body or in His whole form. . . . Wherefore one can see Him, to use the words of the Song, looking forth at the windows, leaning out as far as His navel through the lattice at the summit of the dome like an earnest and vehement lover.

His eyes, to those who have achieved a clean understanding, are gentle and friendly and instill the joy of contrition in the souls of the pure in heart and of the poor in spirit. . . . Such are the eyes to those who have a clean understanding; to those, however, who are condemned by their own judgment, they are scornful and hostile and boding of ill, the face is wrathful, terrifying, stern and filled with hardness, for the face of the Lord is of this fashion for evildoers.⁷⁷

The mosaic that Mesarites describes probably resembled the dome mosaic of the church of Daphni, including such details as Christ blessing with the right hand and holding the Gospels with fingers of the left hand spread "as far as possible from each other" (Fig. 26).

The ekphrasis suggests the power of Christ's gaze and gesture. From the rim of heaven, he leans out, down, and toward us. Given our, by now, innate assumptions about vision, conditioned by the Renaissance and its aftermath, we do indeed regard such a mosaic like Mango's modern beholders with whom I began. Thus the mosaic appears flat and two-dimensional, a posterlike image pasted to the gold ceiling of the church, even though its actual surface is a dome, curving down to us. Mesarites instead saw it as a figure leaning past the rim of heaven and down into our space. Christ is not behind what we regard as the pictorial plane. He comes down from heaven into the actual space and eye of the beholder, whether pure or impure in heart. The immediacy and presence of the figure is yet another consequence of extramission, and, of course, of the religious doctrines that stressed the presence and immediacy of the depicted, the archetype, in and through the depiction. It is because the eyes of such a religious figure were thought to be potent that attempts were later made to efface the eyes of images from this culture and others.⁷⁸



26. Daphni. View of the dome and pendentives. (Photograph: author)

* * *

By this point and from a different path, we have come near a major interpretation of Byzantine art, that provided by the Viennese art historian Otto Demus in one of the most important books on medieval art this century, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration*. There he introduced the concept of "the icon in space."⁷⁹ It may be observed at the center of the mosaic program of the early-twelfth-century church at Daphni (Fig. 26). The prophets on the vertical walls of the drum exhibit scrolls to be read by us below. At the same time, the prophets also direct our eyes upward to the Pantocrator, whom they prophesy. In the squinches below, figures, such as Gabriel and Mary at the Annunciation, gesture to each other across the corner of this central space, our space. The dove at the Baptism descends from heaven, as if sent by the Pantocrator in the heavenly dome above, and John the Baptist and the angels again walk across the central space and toward the unclothed Christ at the back of the squinch. Similar spatial dynamics govern the organization of the other feast scenes here, the Nativity and the Transfiguration.

Thus the narrative and hortative interaction thereby takes place before us, but also around, behind, and over us. Mosaics on the walls of a church, or portable icons on easels in the nave below, all belong to a sacralized space, consecrated by images

through the sense of vision: "As the faithful, by means of the sense of sight, look at the sacred icon of Christ, and of our Lady and true Mistress, the holy Theotokos, of the holy angels and all the saints, they are sanctified, and impress their minds with the memory of them, and in their hearts believe in one God."⁸⁰ The space of the church is shared by beholder and beheld, who are the congregation and the saints, but also the saints and the congregation for Mesarites and Photios.

The intellectual context for Demus's theory, its theoretical motivations, is not obvious from his book, but I am convinced that it derives from the work of a founding member of the Viennese school, Alois Riegl, even if that relation is nowhere directly stated. Riegl is best known for his contributions to art historical formalism, but in his study of Dutch group portraits, Riegl was also concerned with issues of beholding. He argued, in the case of a painting such as *De Staalmeesters* (Fig. 27), that compositionally, Dutch group portraits were intentionally opposed to ancient art, an art that was self-contained. In the painting, the viewer's relation to the portraits and vice versa creates an exterior unity, a unity not merely within the composition but one that refers to, and is completed by, the beholder.⁸¹

The same is true, I conclude, for Byzantine art, but that exterior unity is accomplished not only by elements within the art, but also and mainly by the contemporary visibility or cultural context that surrounds it, what Ernst Gombrich, also indebted to the Viennese school but more to modern psychology, termed the "beholder's share."⁸² The Byzantine icon exists in space, in the physical presence of the religious beholder, no matter whether that icon was small and portable and held in the believer's hands, or a large wall mosaic, visually beheld and optically grasped from a distance. For Rembrandt's men to relate to their beholders, they must look and gesture out to them. The operative fiction is that what is depicted lies behind the plane of the perspectival window. Compared to the Byzantine mosaic, the figures in the Dutch painting appear uncomfortable, as though troubled by the viewer's presence. Although gazing outward, these men cannot see who is looking at them, as if the pictorial window was, in fact, a two-way mirror. We can see them, they know we are there, but they do not see us. Neither they, nor anyone else in painting from the Renaissance tradition, can break through this window, because, by definition, it occupies a neutral zone between viewed and viewer. In contrast, the Christ of Daphni or the Church of the Holy Apostles leans through that "window" with insouciant ease. Optics and religious belief make this Christ a part of the religious drama enacted below. Optics alone, the conventions of one-point perspective, and pictorial verism are the only tools available to Rembrandt and the viewers of his day to effect a similar exterior unity.

Unlike the omnipresent photographic eye of our world, vision in Byzantium was not merely mechanistic or physical. It was also moral and situational, so that the act of seeing, like our notion of interpretation, depended upon who you were and when, where, and how you saw, as I reconstructed for Photios's sermon in Hagia Sophia. Only those spectators, as Photios declared in the passage under discussion,



27. Rembrandt, *De Staalmeesters*. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam.

"whose apprehension is not soiled by wicked doctrines," achieve proper understanding and perception. As quoted earlier, Mesarites concludes the same about the mosaic of Christ in the dome. Christ's eyes are "gentle and friendly" to the good, but "scornful and hostile" to the evil.⁸³ In other words, in Byzantium you measure your own soul by your interpretation of the image before you, a lifelike figure that you touch and grasp through your eye's optical rays. Then, seeing was active and determinative and hence the opposite of the passive, neutral optical process, assumed by modern science and its positivistic subsidiaries, antiquarianism and art history. Unlike our conventions of watching movies or television, the Byzantine beholder was neither passive nor isolated, but engaged with images and with communities viewed and viewing. A closer modern analogy to this devotional space, though approximate at best, would be the interactive, community-enhancing world of cyberspace, another virtual reality also accessed through touch and sight.⁸⁴

In this chapter, I have pieced together one version of Byzantine vision and sought to justify its internal logic, so as to make it more appealing to readers and viewers in our fin de siècle. But that vision ought to remain foreign for at least two reasons that stand in the way of its recognition and acceptance by us. The first concerns visibility as a religious phenomenon and the varieties of religious experience deemed legitimate in the West and, more relevantly, in Western scholarship. Here the work of

Stanley Tambiah is helpful. In his Morgan lectures, published in 1990, Tambiah sought to understand the changing Western distinctions among magic, science, and religion, all of which are commingled in Byzantine visuality. The watershed periods are the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment.⁸⁵ Extending Tambiah's argument to Orthodoxy, Robert Mathiesen describes the "sharp modern distinction" that has been made in Western scholarship between acts that are passive and supplicatory, and thus religious, and those that are more active and interventionist, and thus magical. These differences are associated with Western and Eastern Europe, respectively, and are embedded in the scholarship that the former produces about the latter.⁸⁶

A second impediment to our recognition of Byzantine visuality derives from basic tenets of a modernism that persists in the postmodernism of today, but which is fundamental to earlier scholarship on Byzantine beholding. While Demus's work (1948) was pioneering and still inspires,⁸⁷ it remains tied to a modernist concern for form, in spite of his attempts to escape from it. Similarly, Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1960) is indebted to modernism, even if it can now be read as a precursor of postmodernism. And modernism is the aesthetic world that Mango (1963) took for granted and then directed toward the Byzantine visuality that he was one of the first to explore.

At the turn of the century, the work of Riegl and others introduced into yet another discourse the contrasting perceptual categories of optical and tactile.⁸⁸ One assumption of modernist art and criticism was the superiority of the optical over the tactile. Abstraction and flatness had increasingly been privileged since the post-impressionists, not coincidentally the time when the avant-garde became interested in Byzantine art. This art came to be understood as optical. Tactile values that privilege plasticity and depth were disparaged, and optical/tactile became yet another of art history's dialectical principles. These theories are at play in an interesting essay, entitled "Byzantine Parallels" and published in 1958, by the major midcentury critic Clement Greenberg. Here he concludes that "the tendency of modernist painting has been to turn the conventions of sculptural naturalism inside out, and to create thereby a kind of pictorial space that would invoke no sense other than that of sight."⁸⁹ Byzantine art, he thought, effected a similar transformation of Greco-Roman art, creating flat, decorative abstraction, divorced from the natural world, versus the sculptural illusions of that world, created in earlier and later periods.⁹⁰

The argument was both new and old. At the end of the nineteenth century, Berenson already understood Giotto's tactile paintings to have triumphed over the opticality of Cimabue and the Byzantine style.⁹¹ Proponents of modernism, such as Clive Bell⁹² or Roger Fry,⁹³ praised Byzantine art for its significant form and rejected the judgments of those, like Berenson, who preferred Renaissance art. Finally, D. Talbot Rice, whom Greenberg mentions in his essay, introduced the ideas of Bell and Fry into art historical scholarship on Byzantine art in his influential *Byzantine Art* of 1935, revised and reprinted in 1968.⁹⁴

Thus, Mango's paradox with which I began was fostered by a tradition of schol-

arship that emphasized certain aspects of Byzantine religious life over others and by an art criticism that made icons into art. Critics looked at Byzantine painting in the same way that they did at modern art and applied to both the supposedly oppositional categories of the optical and the tactile. Yet Byzantine art is not modern, and its artists had no interest in being legitimating precursors of modernism. They and their audiences thought that they saw tactilely, as well as optically, and they looked at icons with eyes of faith. In sum, if to the Byzantine believer's gaze we add the "beholder's share" of the modernists and stir gently in an era of postmodernism, the paradox begins to dissolve.

APPENDIX

From Cyril Mango, *The Homilies of Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958). Original in B. Laourdas, *ΦΩΤΙΟΥ ΟΜΙΛΙΑΙ* (Thessaloniki: Hetaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1959), 170-1.

HOMILY XVII

"Homily Delivered from the ambo of the Great Church, on Holy Saturday, in the Presence of the Christ-Loving Emperors, when the form of the Theotokos had been Depicted and Uncovered."

5. (p. 294) . . . "Just as speech is transmitted by hearing, so a form through sight is imprinted upon the tablets of the soul, giving to those whose apprehension is not soiled by wicked doctrines a representation of knowledge concordant with piety. Martyrs have suffered for their love of God, showing with their blood the ardour of their desire, and their memory is contained in books. These deeds they are also seen performing in pictures, as painting presents the martyrdom of those blessed men more vividly to our knowledge. Others have been burnt alive, a sacrifice sanctified by their prayer, fasting and other labours. These things are conveyed both by stories and by pictures, but it is the spectators rather than the hearers who are drawn to emulation. The Virgin is holding the Creator in her arms as an infant. Who is there who would not marvel, more from the sight of it than from the report, at the magnitude of the mystery, and would not rise up to laud the ineffable condescension that surpasses all words? For even if the one introduces the other, yet the comprehension that comes about through sight is shown in very fact to be far superior to the learning that penetrates through the ears. Has a man lent his ear to a story? Has his intelligence visualized and drawn to itself what he has heard? Then, after judging it with sober attention, he deposits it in his memory. No less – indeed much greater – is the power of sight. For surely, having somehow through the outpouring and effluence

of the optical rays touched and encompassed the object, it too sends the essence of the thing seen on to the mind, letting it be conveyed from there to the memory for the concentration of unfailing knowledge. Has the mind seen? Has it grasped? Has it visualized? Then it has effortlessly transmitted the forms to the memory."

NOTES

- 1 Cyril Mango, "Antique Statuary and the Byzantine Beholder," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* [hereafter *DOP*] 17 (1963): 65. Recently, similar material has been studied by Helen Saradi-Mendelovici, "Christian Attitudes toward Pagan Monuments in Late Antiquity and Their Legacy in Later Byzantine Centuries," *DOP* 44 (1990): 47-61.
- 2 "Truth and Convention in Byzantine Descriptions of Works of Art," *DOP* 28 (1974): 111-40. Also relevant is the consideration of medieval and modern attitudes by Robert Grigg, "Byzantine Credulity as an Impediment to Antiquarianism," *Gesta* 26 (1987): 3-9.
- 3 Cyril Mango, *Byzantine Literature as a Distorting Mirror* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 18.
- 4 Especially important is his *The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1972).
- 5 Mango, *Mirror*, 15-16. He also emphasizes that "some of the distortion is of our own making" (18).
- 6 Maguire, "Truth and Convention," 139-40.
- 7 *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1981).
- 8 Alexander Kazhdan and Henry Maguire, "Byzantine Hagiographical Texts as Sources on Art," *DOP* 45 (1991): 4-9. This article then leads to Maguire's recent book, *The Icons of their Bodies: Saints and their Images in Byzantium* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1996). He takes up similar issues in "Originality in Byzantine Art Criticism," in A. R. Littlewood, *Originality in Byzantine Literature, Art and Music* (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1995), 101-15. See also Leslie Brubaker, "Life Imitates Art: Writings on Byzantine Art History, 1991-1992," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* [hereafter *BMGS*] 17 (1993): 199-200. As she notes, John Onians, a decade earlier, had considered similar issues in regard to the transition from antiquity to late antiquity, noting that the spectator's response or the beholders share increased over time: "Abstraction and Imagination in Late Antiquity," *Art History* 3 (1980): 1-24.
- 9 Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic, An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), xi, xix.
- 10 As Jas Elsner put it, following Clifford Geertz, "a theory of art is at the same time a theory of culture." See "Image and Iconoclasm in Byzantium," *Art History* 11 (1988): 477.
- 11 For example, Constance Classen, *Worlds of Sense, Exploring the Senses in History and Across Cultures* (London: Routledge, 1993); David Howes, ed., *The Varieties of Sensory Experience, A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991).
- 12 Michael Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy, A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 29-108.
- 13 *Writing in Gold, Byzantine Society and Its Icons* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); *The Byzantine Eye, Studies in Art and Patronage* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1989).
- 14 Subtitled *The Transformation of Art from the Pagan World to Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).
- 15 Liz James, "Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and Be on Your Guard': Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople," *Gesta* 35 (1996): 12-20.
- 16 "To Understand Ultimate Things and Enter Secret Places: Ekphrasis and Art in Byzantium," *Art History* 14 (1991): 1-17.
- 17 The point is made from religious sources by Leslie Brubaker, "Byzantine Art in the Ninth Century: Theory, Practice, and Culture," *BMGS* 13 (1989): 25-6; and idem, "Perception and Conception: Art, Theory and Culture in Ninth-Century Byzantium," *Word and Image* 5 (1989): 19-32.
- 18 Liz James, "Colour and the Byzantine Rainbow," *BMGS* 15 (1991): 66-94.
- 19 Liz James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).
- 20 We have Prof. Mango to thank for his widely used translation and commentary on the sermons of Photios: Cyril Mango, *The Homilies of Photius Patriarch of Constantinople* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1958). This particular homily, no. 17, is discussed on 279-86. The Greek is available in B. Laourdas, *ΦΩΤΙΟΥ ΟΜΙΛΙΑΙ* (Thessaloniki: Hetaireia Makedonikon Spoudon, 1959), 164-86.
- 21 Stephen G. Xydis, "The Chancel Barrier, Solea, and Ambo of Hagia Sophia," *Art Bulletin* 29 (1947): 14-15. Xydis's basic conclusions are accepted, but emended slightly by additional archaeological evidence in George P. Majeska, "Notes on the Archeology of St. Sophia at Constantinople: The Green Marble Bands on the Floor," *DOP* 32 (1978): 299-308. See also Thomas F. Mathews, *The Early Churches of Constantinople: Architecture and Liturgy* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971), 98, 124; Rowland J. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia, Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great Church* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1988), 222-3.
- 22 Mathews, *Early Churches*, 133-4.
- 23 Paul Lemerle suggests that Photios was born about 810: *Le premier humanisme byzantin* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1971), 181. On eyeglasses, see Edward Rosen, "The Invention of Eyeglasses," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 11 (1956): 13-46, 183-218.
- 24 Nicolas Oikonomidès, "Some Remarks on the Apse Mosaic of St. Sophia," *DOP* 39 (1985): 111; Mango, *Homilies*, 295. For Oikonomidès, this and other inconsistencies in Photios's description indicate that the mosaic presently in the apse was not the image that Photios extolled: Oikonomidès, "Apse Mosaic," 111-12. This argument has not been generally accepted, as it contravenes the archaeological evidence: Cyril Mango and Ernest J. W. Hawkins, "The Apse Mosaics of St. Sophia at Istanbul, Report on Work Carried Out in 1964," *DOP* 19 (1965): 142-8.
- 25 Mango and Hawkins, "Apse Mosaics," 116-117.
- 26 Mango, *Homilies*, 290.
- 27 Maguire, "Truth and Convention," 134.
- 28 The latter conclusion is stressed by Ioli Kalavrezou, "Images of the Mother: When the Virgin Mary Became Meter Theou," *DOP* 44 (1990): 170.
- 29 Maguire, *Art and Eloquence*, 53-83.
- 30 As discussed by James and Webb, "Ultimate Things."
- 31 For example, Robin Cormack's long paraphrase of the sermon skips over Photios's remarks about vision: *Writing in Gold*, 150.

- 32 "Even if a man practised silence all his life long, he would now, above all else, strive to be loquacious and exercise his tongue in the arts of rhetoric" (Mango, *Homilies*, 286).
- 33 For Aristotle, sight is the preferred sense, the most esteemed: "The reason for this is that of all the senses sight best helps us to know things, and reveals many distinctions." Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1.1.2, trans. Hugh Tredennick (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), 2-3.
- 34 Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Spirit of Eastern Christendom (600-1700)* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 121-2. See also Kathleen Corrigan, *Visual Polemics in the Ninth-Century Byzantine Psalters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 136-137. As she notes, the Iconophiles also argue - sometimes in the same text - for the equality of seeing and hearing, but often this equality is an initial ploy to legitimate images, which are later declared superior forms of knowledge to words that are heard.
- 35 Surveyed in David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 1-17.
- 36 In Homily X, concerning the pavement of a church in the palace, he writes: "Democritus would have said, I think, on seeing the minute work of the pavement and taking it as a piece of evidence, that his atoms were close to being discovered here actually impinging on the sight" (Mango, *Homilies*, 187).
- 37 When this embassy occurred, where it went, and even whether it took place has been debated. The matter is surveyed in Warren T. Treadgold, *The Nature of the Bibliotheca of Photius* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, 1980), 16-17, 34-6, where it is argued that Photios went to Samarra in 845. The Muslim caliph had earnestly sought the services of Photios's contemporary, Leo the Mathematician, but the emperor Theophilos (829-42) countered with a more compelling offer. See Warren Treadgold, *The Byzantine Revival 780-842* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988), 307-8, 319. Working in Baghdad at this time under the support of several caliphs was Al-Kindi. His treatise, *De aspectibus*, was based upon Euclid's *Optica* and long remained influential in the Islamic world. See Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, 18-32.
- 38 N. G. Wilson, *Photius The Bibliotheca* (London: Duckworth, 1994), 11; Treadgold, *Nature of the Bibliotheca*, 103-4. As Treadgold discusses, the sole book on mathematics noted in the *Bibliotheca* is a treatise of Nicomachus of Gerasa on arithmetic, which contains nothing about optics. At the end of his review of Nicomachus, Photios indicates that he knew many who were expert in mathematics, but does not include himself in that company. This is relevant for the present concern, because optics was considered a branch of mathematics.
- 39 Treadgold, *Bibliotheca*, 6-7.
- 40 By A. I. Sabra and David C. Lindberg, respectively, *Dictionary of the Middle Ages* (New York: Scribner, 1987), 9:240-253; Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*. Unfortunately, there also is no entry on Byzantine optics in the otherwise exemplary *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).
- 41 K. Vogel, "Byzantine Science," *The Cambridge Medieval History*, pt. 2, ed. J. M. Hussey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 4:282-3.
- 42 *Euclidis Opera Omnia*, ed. I. L. Heiberg and H. Menge (Leipzig: Teubner, 1895), 7:1. A useful general accounting of the importance of Euclidian mathematics for ancient optics (and hence for its successors) is A. Mark Smith, "Saving the Appearances of the Appearances: The Foundations of Classical Geometrical Optics," *Archive for History of Exact Sciences* 24 (1981): 73-99.
- 43 C. D. Brownson, "Euclid's Optics and its Compatibility with Linear Perspective," *Archive for the History of the Exact Sciences* 24 (1981): 166.
- 44 See the learned comments of David Pingree in his review of *Hypsikles: Die Aufgangszeiten der Gestirne in Gnomon* 40 (1968): 15-16. On Euclid in Byzantium, see the entry by Pingree in *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, vol. 2, 738-9. Far more impressionistic is the discussion of Gervase Mathew, who was, however, one of the first to appreciate the relevance of optical theory for Byzantine art: *Byzantine Aesthetics* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 29-31.
- 45 Pingree in *Gnomon* 40 (1968): 16.
- 46 N. G. Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium* (London: Gerald Duckworth, 1983), 86. Its contents are described in Iohannes Mercati and Pius Franchi de' Cavalieri, *Codices Vaticani graeci, Codices 1-329* (Rome: Typis Polyglottis Vaticanis, 1923), 246-8.
- 47 P. Tannery, ed., *Quadrivium de Georges Pachymère, Studi et Testi* 94 (1940): 313-14.
- 48 L. G. Westerink, ed. *Michael Psellus De Omnifaria Doctrina, Critical Text and Introduction* (Utrecht: J. L. Beijers, 1948), 60, 110.
- 49 D. J. O'Meara, *Michaelis Pselli Philosophica Minora* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1989), 2:14-17.
- 50 A. Delatte, *Textes grecs relatifs à l'histoire des sciences* vol. 2 of *Anecdota Atheniensia et alia* (Liège: Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres, 1939), 71.
- 51 Glanville Downey, "Nikolaos Mesarites: Description of the Church of the Holy Apostles at Constantinople," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* n.s. 47, no. 6 (1957): 895.
- 52 David C. Lindberg, "Alhazen's Theory of Vision and its Reception in the West," *Studies in the History of Medieval Optics* (London: Variorum, 1983), 3:321-8; Lindberg, *Theories of Vision*, 58-67.
- 53 Wilson, *Scholars of Byzantium*, 165. John Scarborough showed how Seth combined Arabic and Byzantine sources in his medical writings: "Symposium on Byzantine Medicine, Introduction," *DOP* 38 (1984): xiii-xiv.
- 54 There is evidence, however, that Muslim astronomy was known from the eleventh century: Anne Tihon, "L'astronomie byzantine (du Ve au XVe siècle)," *Byzantion* 51 (1981): 611.
- 55 James R. Payton, Jr., "John of Damascus on Human Cognition: An Element in His Apologetic for Icons," *Church History* 65 (1996): 180-1.
- 56 "First Apology Against Those Who Attack Holy Images," I.47: P. Bonifatius Kotter, *Die Schriften des Johannes von Damaskos* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1975), 3:152.
- 57 "Second Apology," II.10: Kotter, *Schriften*, vol. 3, 99. A similar devotion is described by Sophronius of Jerusalem at the cave of the Nativity in Bethlehem: "The shining slab which received the infant God, I will touch, with my eyes, my mouth, my forehead, to gain its blessing." See John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusades* (Warminster, England: Aris & Phillips, 1977), 92. I thank Jacqueline Tuerk for this latter reference. The importance of seeing and touching is emphasized by Gary Vikan, "Pilgrims in Magi's Clothing: The Impact of Mimesis on Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art," in *The Blessings of Pilgrimage*, ed. Robert Ousterhout (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 97-107.
- 58 The latter is the thesis of the book by David Chidester, *Word and Light, Seeing, Hearing, and Religious Discourse* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 1.
- 59 By the theories inherited from antiquity, either intromission or extramission, all vision was haptic, for, as Smith points out, vision required physical contact with the thing seen: "Saving the Appearances," 88 n. 58. The difference was in motivation, i.e. whether the contact was initiated by the viewed or the viewer.

- 60 Cyril Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 134. The passage is discussed by Leslie Brubaker in her introduction to *Sacred Image East and West* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 7.
- 61 "First Apology," I.17: Kotter, *Schriften*, vol. 3, 93. See also n. 33 above.
- 62 Paul J. Alexander, *The Patriarch Nicephorus of Constantinople* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958), 211. See also I. P. Sheldon-Williams in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A. H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 514-15.
- 63 "Second Apology," II.10: Kotter, *Schriften*, vol. 3, 99.
- 64 "First Apology," I.47: Kotter, *Schriften*, vol. 3, 151.
- 65 For example, the Ecumenical Council of 787 proclaimed, "We have believed these to be true through hearing, and we confirm them through graphic imitation for our greater assurance, for constituted, as we are of flesh and blood, we hasten through seeing to make the assurance of our souls more secure." Ambrosius Giakalis, *Images of the Divine, The Theology of Icons at the Seventh Ecumenical Council* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), 62; Joannes Dominicus Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum*, vol. 13, col. 101E.
- 66 Chidester, *Word and Light*, 6-8. Both Psellos and Seth discuss the sense of hearing: *De Omnifaria doctrina*, 108 (Westerink, 60); Delatte, *Anecdota*, vol. 2, 73-4.
- 67 Downey, "Mesarites," 867.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 877.
- 69 For example, Clarence Maloney, ed. *The Evil Eye* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976).
- 70 James Russell, "The Evil Eye in Early Byzantine Society: Archaeological Evidence from Anemurium in Isauria," *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/3 (1982): 539-46. More recently, see his essay, "The Archaeological Context of Magic in the Early Byzantine Period," *Byzantine Magic*, ed. Henry Maguire (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1995), 35-50; Henry Maguire, "From the Evil Eye to the Eye of Justice: The Saints, Art, and Justice in Byzantium," *Law and Society in Byzantium, Ninth-Twelfth Centuries*, ed. Angeliki E. Laiou and Dieter Simon (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1994), 217-39; Eunice Dauterman Maguire et al., *Art and Holy Powers in the Early Christian House* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 4-5.
- 71 *De Omnifaria doctrina*, 109 (Westerink, 60). As elsewhere, Psellos is repeating Plutarch, here *Moralia*, V.7: *Plutarch's Moralia*, trans. Paul A. Clement and Herbert B. Hoffleit (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969), 420-3.
- 72 Matthew W. Dickie, "The Fathers of the Church and the Evil Eye," *Byzantine Magic*, 18.
- 73 Blake Leyerle, "John Chrysostom and the Gaze," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 1 (1993): 163.
- 74 Ihor Sevcenko, "Theodore Metochites, the Chora, and the Intellectual Trends of His Time," in *The Kariye Djami*, ed. Paul A. Underwood (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 4:64-5: "What evil spirit has cast his envy [ἐβόσκη] upon us, forever lurking and plundering and stealing away the progress of the best, not as much in the open as on the sly and surreptitiously, by mischievous devices, without ever relenting, or ever closing an eye?"
- 75 *Greek Anthology*, I.106: Mango, *Art of the Byzantine Empire*, 184.
- 76 Mango, *Homilies*, 291.
- 77 Downey, "Mesarites," 869-70.
- 78 See, for example, the case of an icon on Crete illustrated in Robin Cormack, *Painting the Soul. Icons, Death Masks, Shrouds* (London: Reaktion Books, 1997), fig. 8. David Freedberg (*The Power of Images, Studies in the History and Theory of Response* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989]) notes that before Muhammad removed idols from the Ka'abah, he struck their eyes (389). Freedberg also discusses the eyes of paintings being attacked during the Protestant Reformation (415-16).
- 79 Otto Demus, *Byzantine Mosaic Decoration, Aspects of Monumental Art in Byzantium* (Boston: Boston Book and Art Shop, 1955; first ed., London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1948), 13-14.
- 80 Acts of the Seventh Ecumenical Council: Giakalis, *Images*, 82. Mansi, vol. 13, col. 249E.
- 81 For Riegl, I depend upon Margaret Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992) and her chapter, "The Ethics of Attention," 155-69. *Das holländische Gruppenporträt* was first published in Vienna in 1902 and reprinted and edited by Karl M. Swoboda in 1931 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Staatsdruckerei). Demus was beginning his career in Austria at this time. He had completed his dissertation in 1928. In 1931, he published with E. Diez, *Byzantine Mosaics in Greece: Hosios Lucas and Daphni* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931). Brief biographical details about Otto Demus are available in the necrology by Herbert Hunger in *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 42 (1992): 431-3.
- 82 E. H. Gombrich, *Art and Illusion, A Study in the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1960), 181-290. The use of the word "beholder" by Gombrich and by Mango in his article of 1963 raises the issue of relationship of the latter to the former. One wonders if Mango was writing in some way in response to Gombrich. Mango was associated with Dumbarton Oaks in Washington, D.C., at least from 1957; the preface to *Homilies*, p. ix, is dated Washington, D.C., June 1957. Gombrich delivered the lectures upon which the book was based at the National Gallery of Art in 1956. For his part, Gombrich, who shows an interest in Byzantine art (144-5) and cites Demus's book (414, 417), is ultimately not sympathetic to that art. That rejection has inspired rebuttals, the latest being Elsner, *Art and the Roman Viewer*, 177-89.
- 83 The distinction has been discussed most recently by Henry Maguire in *Law and Society*, 233-4.
- 84 See the discussion of cyberspace, appropriately, in *Britannica Online, Book of the Year* (1996) by Robert Everett-Green. He contrasts television audiences, "passive and isolated," with those active and interactive communities formed by and through the Internet.
- 85 *Magic, Science, Religion and the Scope of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11-31.
- 86 Robert Mathiesen, "Magic in Slavia Orthodoxa: The Written Tradition," *Byzantine Magic*, 161-2.
- 87 The basic argument is repeated in Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence, A History of the Image Before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 173-8.
- 88 Olin, *Forms of Representation*, 132-7.
- 89 "Byzantine Parallels," collected in his *Art and Culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1961), 167.

- 90 Ibid., 168–70.
- 91 Bernard Berenson, *The Italian Painters of the Renaissance* (New York: Phaidon, 1968), 2:1–8. This essay, entitled “Florentine Painters,” was first published in 1896.
- 92 Clive Bell, *Art* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1916), 130: “[S]ince the Byzantine primitives set their mosaics at Ravenna no artist in Europe has created forms of greater significance unless it be Cézanne.”
- 93 Roger Fry, *Transformations, Critical and Speculative Essays on Art* (New York: Brentano’s, 1926), 78. In the late nineteenth century there was a “renewed interest in Byzantine art which everywhere manifested itself with the breakdown of the Renaissance tyranny” (205).
- 94 *Byzantine Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935, repr. and expanded Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968): “The approach [taken] is that of . . . an art-historian who is interested in the modern movement, of one who sees in Byzantine art something which links it, as far as its aims and methods are concerned, with the art of to-day. . . . These similarities are due to kindred feeling and to the abstract quality at the back of both, and it is the author’s belief that a study of the one may well help towards an understanding of the other” (1st ed., v–vi).

CHAPTER SEVEN

VISIO DEI

Changes in Medieval Visuality

CYNTHIA HAHN

FROM GLANCE TO GAZE

The marked difference that exists between early and later Western medieval images originated in part in a changing understanding of what it meant to see.¹ More specifically, certain changes were keyed to beliefs about the ability of corporeal sight to obtain knowledge of the divine. Early medieval visual experience of the divine can be described as received by an individual in community and focused on an instantaneous and powerful effect, which struck or engraved the heart. The viewer was immobilized and distant from the sight (although viewpoint was essentially immaterial), and had only a minute, fragmentary, yet simultaneously all-encompassing apprehension of the divine. The experience, as we shall see, is articulated most clearly by Gregory the Great. In contrast, the visual experience of the divine in the thirteenth century and later is more clearly structured by physical and metaphysical ideas: It is dependent on a receptive and active soul cleansed and trained, constructed in solitary contemplation or from the private reading of the pages of a book, and figured as an act of entrance. These late-medieval ideas of vision might be characterized as Augustinian in origin. In sum, the possibility of the vision of the divine, the *visio dei*, shifted from the momentary and the glance, received almost as a blow, to the prolonged gaze apprehended as an interactive experience. Art may have responded to this change or, as I believe, may have helped to shape it, shifting from the representation of the unifying, symbolic, and even terrifying truth to fragmented yet seductive and enlarged visions.

Many scholars have noted aspects of these qualities of vision and art in the later Middle Ages, notably Suzanne Lewis, Jeffrey Hamburger, and Michael Camille,² but the early Middle Ages has not yet received the same attention. In this chapter, I will attempt to characterize changes in the perceived possibilities of vision from the early to the later Middle Ages. Notwithstanding Martin Jay’s convincing condemnation of the notion of any unitary ocular regime,³ and the inevitable errors of gen-

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BEYOND THE RENAISSANCE

Seeing as Others Saw

Edited by

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